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Morris students experience valuable job shadowing opportunities at Prairie Ridge Hospital and Health Services

Summary: Katelyn Kuenn '11, La Crosse, Wisconsin, and Tara Gromatka, Alexandria have been "job shadowing" medical providers.

(April 27, 2011)-University of Minnesota, Morris students have always been encouraged to take their classroom knowledge and find ways to practice it in real life situations. Such has been the aim of Morris students Katelyn Kuenn '11, La Crosse, Wisconsin, and Tara Gromatka, Alexandria. Kuenn and Gromatka have been "job shadowing" medical providers at Prairie Ridge Hospital and Health Services in Morris.

"The students are strictly on observational shadowing status," says physician assistant (PA) Alfredo Altamirano, PA-C, MPAS. "We started the shadowing program in spring 2010 with two students. Now we have 10–15 registered with us. Enrollment varies on the season, semester, and student year. They are allowed full access to patient visits, procedures, and testing, all in accordance with privacy laws and patient permission."

Katelyn Kuenn, future physician assistant

Kuenn, a senior, started shadowing in March 2010. She has observed care by Altamirano and Margie Nelson, advanced practice registered nurse (CNFP), as well as John F. Stock, M.D., a Morris alumnus, and June Zimmerman, CNFP. Kuenn has also observed a variety of surgical procedures, surgeries, and general check-ups. After seeing the patient with the healthcare provider, Kuenn and the provider discuss how to handle various medical situations.

"All of the providers have been an inspiration, and it has been an honor to shadow so many," says Kuenn. "They taught me a plethora of things about patient care, administrative work, teamwork, motivation, and being passionate about the work you do. They challenge me to think about the situation and what could be done to resolve the problem. It's rewarding to know that I someday can make a difference in people's lives."

A biology major and chemistry minor with a pre-medicine focus, Kuenn plans to "take a year off to work the medical field" after graduating from Morris. She then plans to attend a graduate PA program. PA programs require job shadowing, so her time at Prairie Ridge Hospital and Health Services provides an important resume-building opportunity in addition to being an educational experience.

Tara Gromatka, future nurse practitioner

Primarily under Altamirano's guidance, Gromatka, a biology and psychology major, has spent three days per week for the past five months watching a wide range of medical procedures, including stress tests, skin biopsies, wound care, dermagraft placement, and treatment and management of chronic conditions such as diabetes. She has also seen emergency protocol for patients with acute chest pain and stroke symptoms.

A 2006 Morris graduate, Gromatka returned to campus to complete prerequisite classes for attending the University of Washington School of Nursing nurse practitioner graduate program. Like most medical programs, the nursing program requires many hours of healthcare experience, making job shadowing at Prairie Ridge a great opportunity. She recently

learned that she has been accepted to the graduate program.

“This shadowing program allowed me to fulfill this requirement in a truly meaningful and educationally valuable way,” says Gromatka. “Shadowing gave me access to patients in an environment that closely reflects the type of care I wish to provide as a nurse practitioner.”

Gromatka cites her job shadowing experience as one of the most beneficial investments in her college career. “It has allowed me to apply the ‘textbook’ knowledge to real life situations.”

Adds Altamirano, “Students are getting an invaluable insight into rural medicine and all its various disciplines. They are experiencing first-hand what it is and what it takes to be a medical provider in today’s ever-changing medical field.”

Photo above: Tara Gromatka

Photo below: Katelyn Kuenn

From left: Alfredo Altamirano PA-C, MPAS, Margie Nelson, RN CFNP, Dr. John Stock, June Zimmerman, RN CFNP

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